

**Athens City Planning Commission
Minutes of Regular Meeting
Wednesday, February 19, 2025, 11:30 a.m.**

A regular meeting of the Athens City Planning Commission was held in City Council Chambers, third floor of City Hall, on February 19, 2025.

Attendees: David Baird, Matthew O'Rourke, and Martin Spink all from Structurepoint, Alan Swank, Robert Delach, and Rhonda Riley

1.Call to Order Chair John Kotowski called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. and administered the oath to those in the audience intending to speak before the Commission. Four members were present, constituting a quorum.

Planning Commission Members:

- Chris Knisely – Present
- John Kotowski, Chair – Present
- Steve Patterson, Mayor – Absent
- Austin Phillips, Vice-Chair – Present
- Andy Stone, Service-Safety Director – Present

Staff:

- Lance Allison, Assistant Director to Code Enforcement– Present
- Meghan Jennings, City Planner – Present

2. Disposition of Minutes The minutes from the February 5, 2025 meeting were reviewed. A correction was made: "Ream Street" should be changed to "Ring Street" (R I N G) on the bottom of the third page.

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Mr. Stone, seconded by Mr. Phillips. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Cases There were no cases presented at this meeting.

4. Communications

American Struturepoint's report on the public input they have received thus far on the Neighborhood Corridor Overlay Zone:

David Baird from American Structurepoint proceeded with a PowerPoint presentation on the Neighborhood Corridor Overlay Zone and the Stimson Avenue corridor plan. An overlay zone, being modifications to zoning regulations to better fit the needs of the community in strategic locations. The Stimson Avenue corridor plan, a federally funded project, aimed to

enhance walkability and address land-use issues, promoting small-scale commercial corridors.

- **Community Engagement:**

- The planning process included community sessions with leaders, business owners, and city staff. In-person sessions featured input from local business figures such as Christine Hughes of Village Bakery, Art Oestrike of Jackie O's, Kate Stotts of Prokos Rentals, Ben Ziff of HAPCAP, City Council member Alan Swank, and Leslie Schaller of CASA and ACE Net.
- Virtual sessions will be scheduled with Peter Kotses of Athens Bike and Sara Quioa of Cool Digs
- A community survey was made available, with a focus on overlay districts and clarifying terms.

- **Concerns:**

- A major concern raised was the difficulty businesses face due to parking requirements. Reducing parking requirements was identified as a balancing act between supporting businesses and accommodating residents.
- Another major concern was the local businesses and recent business closures.
- Legally, the city cannot ban chain restaurants.
- Redevelopment can benefit local businesses because older buildings may not fit the pro forma requirements of chain businesses.

- **Goals:**

- There is a desire to prioritize multi-modal transportation- pedestrians, cyclists, etc.
- Implementing proposed policy changes in a plan through specific zoning ordinance amendments.
- The future vision for Stimson Avenue includes mixed-use developments, focusing on creating housing for young professionals, without turning the area into a student corridor.
- Implementing code changes to accommodate the redevelopment of local businesses.

Discussion:

- **Mr. Kotowski** stated the parking situation is a double-edged sword because the city was developed before the automobile was widely used. Organizations like HAPCAP are doing a good job trying to make the city more multi-modal but there are still challenges. Questioning how to encourage more pedestrian movement throughout the community.
- **Mr. Baird** stated that public engagement would help them understand what code changes need to be made to tailor the corridor to the public's needs and wants.

- **Ms. Knisely** stated Athens is one of the most walkable cities in the state as well as nationally. Also questioned if the local groups could give some insight on the needs of local businesses, including the 21 new businesses.
- **Mr. Stone** asked Mr. Baird to confirm if the tension he's hearing from stakeholders and business owners are the possibility of off-street parking requirements being shrunk or removed in order to support smaller lots fronting on a parcel along an arterial.
- **Mr. Baird** confirmed. He would like to hear from residents that live by the corridors and what their thoughts are on the possibility of reduced parking requirements. Each community is different.
- **Mr. Kotowski** asked if he has worked on other projects in college towns and if there are varying opinions still on reduced parking requirements.
- **Mr. O'Rourke** shared his experience working on projects in places like Manhattan, Kansas, and Greencastle, Indiana, where similar issues with parking and mixed-use developments arose. In these areas, commuters struggle to find parking, especially around downtown areas. In Greencastle, DePauw University faces difficulties attracting professors due to lack of housing options and is considering mixed-use developments to address these issues. He highlighted that solutions vary by location but emphasizes the importance of creating a regulatory environment to encourage private property owners to invest in walkability and development. He clarified that proposed changes focus on private development, not public infrastructure, and stressed that the goal is to foster a supportive environment for private investment, not add public sidewalk improvements.

Code Audit Update:

There is an ongoing review to improve the clarity and user-friendliness of the zoning code to address issues such as inconsistent application and interpretation.

- **Next Steps:**
 - An annotated outline for the code audit has been created.
 - A land use matrix will be provided to help landowners and business owners better understand zoning regulations.
 - Community engagement will continue as the code audit progresses.
 - Present the findings of the Code Audit to Planning Commission

Public Comment: Peter Kotses' Statement Read by Alan Swank

A statement was read on behalf of Peter Kotses, an Athens business owner and former council member, who could not attend the meeting. Kotses expressed concern over the lack of information provided regarding the Neighborhood Corridor Overlay zone planning process and dissatisfaction with the scheduling of stakeholder meetings. He requested more engagement and detailed responses from the administration.

Administration's Response:

- **Ms. Jennings** explained that she initially contacted him about the stakeholder sessions and was informed of his schedule conflict on the 18th. In response, a virtual session was offered, but coordinating schedules with American Structurepoint has been challenging. Ms. Jennings reassured that the virtual session will still be scheduled and will count as public input for the overlay zone considerations. Additionally, Ms. Jennings mentions that Mr. Kotses has emailed with questions, and she has responded to him in detail each time to the best of her ability.
- **Mr. Stone**, from the mayor's administration, responded by expressing his and the administration's commitment to open communication and working closely with community members. He emphasized the willingness to engage with Kotses or any other concerned individuals at any time.

Public Comment: Rob Delach

Rob Delach, Chair of the Board of Zoning Appeals, expressed concerns about the failure of B3 zoning, citing examples such as the Sonic building and the redevelopment of a business on Stimson Avenue. Delach encouraged the Planning Commission to re-evaluate B3 zoning and continue gathering feedback for the code audit.

5. Reports There were no reports from Meghan Jennings/ City Planner or Lance Allison/Assistant Director in Code Enforcement

6. Announcements and Other Business

Mr. Stone Started a Discussion on Zoning in the Vicinity of Second Street, Columbus Road, and Lancaster Street Intersection (Map Attached):

- The Planning Commission was asked to consider zoning adjustments in the area due to several instances of current zoning not aligning with actual land use.
- The former fire station headquarters are under consideration for repurposing. A business has expressed interest in leasing it for a woodworking shop.
- The city would need to transfer ownership of the building to the Athens Community Improvements Corporation, which would then lease it to the business.
- The property is currently zoned as R3, which does not support the proposed use.
- Additional properties in the same area with zoning misalignment include:
 - Ohio Valley Children's Museum (currently R3)
 - Former Highway Patrol Headquarters (currently R1, but used as an administrative building for storing court records)
 - Former Dairy Queen location (zoned B1, which does not permit a drive-thru; this could impact potential business interest)

- Public Defender's Office (partially zoned R1, partially B1)
 - Auto repair facility at Lancaster Street and Columbus Road (currently B1, which does not allow auto repair facilities)
- The Commission agreed that rather than rezoning individual parcels, a broader zoning reassessment of the entire area should be considered.

Comments from Commission Members:

- The members agreed that addressing zoning issues in advance is a proactive approach.
- Further input will be sought from David, who will assist in evaluating the best course of action.

Ms. Knisely Started a Discussion on Old Pomeroy Road Development Proposal:

- The development proposal was linked to a rezoning ordinance that City Council has tabled.
- Spire Development withdrew their proposal, making further immediate action unnecessary.
- **Alan Swank** stated the proposal faced substantial opposition from the community, with a petition containing 377 signatures, though **Mr. Stone** stated roughly 120-130 signatories were not city residents.
- **Alan Swank** mentioned the Planning Commission had previously recommended a broader zoning reassessment of the area, rather than spot zoning changes.
- **Rhonda Riley** of Farhills Drive stated that some residents were not necessarily opposed to increased housing density but had concerns about the lack of clear information regarding the development.
- **Robert Delach** stated the Board of Zoning Appeals had recommended a reassessment of zoning in that area due to multiple related requests.

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting of the Athens City Planning Commission will be held on March 5, 2025 at 11:30 PM.

7. Adjournment

There being no further business, **Mr. Kotowski** motioned to adjourn the meeting. **Mr. Stone** seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting adjourned at 1:15 PM

Minutes prepared by: Monica Flowers, Secretary, Athens City Planning Commission



Lancaster St. & Columbus Rd. Zoning

Map created by Athens City Planner. Data recent as of 2/19/2025.

Zoning

B-1

R-1



R-3